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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION01 OF 04 HARARE 000754

SIPDIS

AF/S FOR G. GALAND
DRL FOR N. WILETT
ADDIS ABABA FOR USAU
ADDIS ABABA FOR ACSS
STATE PASS TO USAID FOR E. LOEN AND L. DOBBINS
STATE PASS TO NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR B. PITTMAN
DCHA/AA FOR MIKE HESS
AFR/AA FOR KATE ALMQUIST AND FRANKLIN MOORE
AFR/SA FOR ELOKEN, LDOBBINS, JKOLE
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SUBJECT: ZIMBABWEAN HUMANITARIAN CRISIS WORSENING AS BAN
REMAINS IN PLACE

REF: HARARE 503

Classified By: Ambassador James D. McGee for reason 1.4 (d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) The Mugabe government continues to deny nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and private voluntary organizations (PVOs) access to 1.3 million at-risk Zimbabweans to provide food, water, seed, fertilizer, and hygienic support. Currently, less than 300,000 people are receiving assistance, and record-low harvest levels this season may expose up to 5 million Zimbabweans to a severe food crisis if the ban remains in place. Additionally, the absence of seed in advance of seasonal rains may mean that the next harvest is as bad or worse and lack of nonfood assistance in the rainy season will increase the risk of cholera and other diseases. While there are large stockpiles of supplies in South Africa and Zimbabwe, the supply backlog is forcing donors to reconsider the utility of sending additional aid to Zimbabwe. Some NGOs have been able to conduct discrete workaround operations with the consent of local officials, though these groups still routinely face the threat of violence from war veterans and youth brigade members. END SUMMARY

Vast Majority of Aid Blocked

¶2. (U) The overwhelming majority of humanitarian aid intended to assist 1.3 million desperate Zimbabweans continues to be blocked by the ban on NGO and PVO activities

instituted in June by Nicholas Goche, the Minister of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare (MPSLSW) (reftel). These activities include the distribution of food-based assistance, as well as seed, fertilizer, hygienic support, and infrastructure projects. A recent assessment of one district in Manicaland by the World Food Program highlighted the severity of the situation. According to the study, 38 percent of households had not consumed any cereal over the previous 7 days, while 61 percent of households had eaten only one meal a day. An additional indicator of the worsening situation was that a majority of households had now turned to selling livestock to purchase food.

Low Harvests and the Approach of Planting Season

13. (U) Persistent shortages of seed, fertilizer, and other agricultural inputs brought about by the ban and the economic crisis in Zimbabwe have led to record-low harvest totals this year. A recent UN Crop and Food Supply Assessment warned that this would expand to 5 million the number of Zimbabweans needing assistance before the next crop is harvested.

14. (U) Additionally, the approach of Zimbabwe's rainy season threatens to exacerbate the impact of the ban due to the inability of NGOs to distribute seed. At a meeting on August 26 between poloff and C-SAFE country representatives from CARE International, Christian Relief Services and World Vision, Edward Brown of C-SAFE said that if the ban was not

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immediately lifted, aid organizations would be unable to distribute seed in September prior to the rains, and rural community farmers would miss an entire crop. Furthermore, USAID officials have warned that if rains begin in October without the distribution of soap and other sanitary items, cholera and diarrheal disease will be widespread. Timing for the resumption of aid is critical as it will take NGOs an estimated 6 weeks to scale up operations to full capacity.

Meanwhile, Food Supply Sits in Warehouses

15. (U) The ban is leading to bulging stockpiles of food, seed, fertilizer, and hygienic supplies in Durban, South Africa, as well as in warehouses throughout Zimbabwe. Fambai Ngirande, a spokesperson for the NGO coalition Nango, said in a recent article in South Africa's Mail and Guardian on-line newspaper, that a portion of those stores were rotting and would be unfit for distribution even if the ban were lifted. (This does not refer to USG food.) According to the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, donors are taking notice of the aid ban and reconsidering the utility of sending additional aid to Zimbabwe. Some supply ships scheduled to arrive in Durban in the coming months risk being diverted to other exposed populations. C-SAFE's Brown also highlighted that the ban would cost the Zimbabwean people 20,000 metric tons of food aid, as USG food aid levels allocated to C-SAFE partners are being reduced from 53,000 to 33,000 metric tons in 2009. The foregone aid has an estimated value of \$14 million dollars.

NGOs Face Violence and Intimidation, Attempt Workarounds

16. (SBU) A trickle of aid continues as NGOs lobby and receive ad hoc permission to resume operations from some sympathetic provincial and district officials in regions throughout the country. Most of this aid is in the form of school-based feeding programs that tend-although not exclusively-to occur in MDC-supportive areas. Even in these areas aid workers face continued intimidation and violence.

CARE International Country Director Stephen Vaughan told poloff that war veterans and youth brigade members routinely ignore these local authorizations and threaten to burn humanitarian vehicles or tell aid workers to "return to Harare." A positive recent development is that HIV/AIDS assistance has resumed at nearly 100 percent of normal operations.

17. (C) The Papal Nuncio to Zimbabwe told us on August 28 that employees of Catholic aid organization CAFOD were forced to bury 2 tons of food aid that had spoiled at their Gweru warehouse. CAFOD had been unable to distribute the food because local ZANU-PF youth groups were intimidating employees and using threats of violence to enforce the ban.

18. (C) Not surprisingly, an exception to the ban was made for a school in Chinhoyi where one of Mugabe's sons studies and where Catholic relief organizations were providing food. According to the Papal Nuncio, when the ban went into effect on June 4, the head of the Marist college in Kutama (where President Mugabe studied) approached the provincial governor

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and explained that banning food assistance would result in the school's closure. This was sufficient cause to convince the governor to authorize an exception to the ban to permit food assistance to the school.

Aid Groups' Take on ZANU-PF's Ban Motivations

19. (C) At the August 26 C-SAFE meeting, representatives from CARE International, Christian Relief Services and World Vision argued that the Zimbabwean Government's long reliance on using food as a political tool made the government intensely distrustful of any international aid organization's stated motivations. Vaughan suggested that there was a prevailing fear within ZANU-PF that food distribution, if allowed, would only create a dependency on international aid groups that would further undermine ZANU-PF's authority. This fear and mistrust is heightened because the GOZ is aware that the US donates 72 percent of all food aid and was demonstrated by Mugabe's statement at the convening of Parliament on August 26 that the West was using food aid as a tool of regime change.

MDC and NGO Strategies to Relieve the Ban

110. (C) MDC Agricultural Secretary Gwarazimba told USAID officers on August 27 that MDC Secretary General Tendai Biti expressed interest in raising the humanitarian access issue at the first session of Parliament and calling the permanent secretaries of MPSLSW and the Ministry of Agriculture to account for the regime's blockage of humanitarian assistance.

111. (SBU) In addition, NGOs and PVOs are increasing their advocacy by issuing a common statement on behalf of over 100 agencies, and are finalizing a presentation to convey the overall impact of the ban in the realms of food, agricultural recovery, nutrition/child protection, and water/sanitation to parliamentarians and representatives of both parties. NGOs also plan to step-up their advocacy efforts to neighboring countries. C-SAFE representatives identified several alternative delivery mechanisms they are considering to increase distributions despite the ban. These include providing take away dry rations through school-based feeding programs, increasing participation of government and parliamentarians during food distribution activities, and allowing beneficiaries to come to warehouses to receive food to circumvent the ban on field activities.

The Regime Also Profiting from Aid Activities

¶12. (C) The Mugabe regime may be motivated to maintain the presence of NGOs in Zimbabwe because virtually all Zimbabweans employed by NGOs receive their salaries in foreign currency and are taxed at just over 50 percent. At an NGO forum on June 11, USAID officials were told this amounts to between one and two million dollars per month in revenue to the government. Unless NGOs choose to reduce personnel, the government will continue to earn this income even as the ban prohibits staff from distributing

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humanitarian assistance.

COMMENT

¶13. (SBU) Despite repeated assurances that the ban would be lifted, including an agreement to do so in the July 21 MOU, the GOZ has not taken any positive action. It is important that the MDC do a better job of publicly highlighting this issue, and that the international/donor community likewise raise the profile of this looming humanitarian disaster. While ZANU-MDC negotiations command attention, millions of Zimbabweans are at risk. END COMMENT
MCGEE